United Nations S/2006/441

Security Council

Distr.: General
27 June 2006
English
Original: French

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in the Central African Republic and the activities of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in the Central African Republic

I. Introduction

1. This report is submitted in compliance with the request of the Security Council contained in the statement issued by its President on 26 September 2001 (S/PRST/2001/25), whereby the Council members requested me to keep them regularly informed about the situation in the Central African Republic and the activities of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in the Central African Republic (BONUCA). This regular report covers the period from January to June 2006.

II. Political situation

2. The political situation was marked by the emergence of internal crises in several major political parties, the work of the National Assembly's first regular session of 2006 and a number of peace and security initiatives.

3. Since the 2005 presidential and legislative elections, some political parties have been undergoing crises of leadership and reorganization. BONUCA, within the framework of its mandate and its conciliation efforts, has been encouraging the political parties to engage in dialogue and to maintain their unity given the vital role they play in the proper functioning and consolidation of the Central African Republic's fragile democracy. Political parties are also involved in efforts to meet the country's socio-economic, security and humanitarian challenges.

4. The National Assembly was in session from 1 March to 30 May 2006, during which time it adopted a large number of draft laws. These included a draft law authorizing the ratification of the Agreement on the Privileges and Immunities of the International Criminal Court in the territory of each State party; a draft law authorizing the ratification of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights concerning the establishment of an African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights; a draft law authorizing the ratification of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime; a draft law authorizing the ratification of the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption and the United Nations Convention against Corruption; and a draft law

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amending the ordinance on the establishment, organization and operation of the country's High Council for Communication.

5. The National Assembly also adopted a draft law on the organization and operation of the National Mediation Council of the Central African Republic. Prior to the consideration of this text, BONUCA organized a day of discussions with parliamentarians on the role of the Mediator of the Republic, the structure of the National Mediation Council and the procedure for appointing its members. This exercise enabled the lawmakers to settle differences of opinion on the structure of the Council and the manner of appointing its members.

6. With regard to national peace initiatives, the Panel of the Wise, in partnership with the Office, carried out a number of awareness-raising campaigns to reduce tension and restore calm in the wake of abuses committed in Bangui and in the northern part of the country. On 3 April 2006, Central African women's groups held a march for the restoration of peace and security. With support from BONUCA, youth groups also held an important march for peace in the Central African Republic. The Head of State took that opportunity to announce the forthcoming organization of a national dialogue on peace and security. Opposition political parties indicated their willingness to take part in a political dialogue, in which public authorities and the armed opposition would also be involved.

III. Socio-economic and humanitarian situation

7. Since the beginning of the year, the social situation has continued to be marked by strikes in the education, health and justice sectors. Economic activity grew slowly as a result of soaring oil prices, among other factors. The real growth of the gross domestic product (GDP) was 2.2 per cent, as against 1.3 per cent in 2004. The trends observed in the first three months of 2006 show increased output in the main export sectors (particularly timber and diamonds) and in manufacturing. Budget revenues exceeded the target figure by 17 per cent, thanks to an improvement in tax revenues that was largely attributable to an increase in the value added tax rate from 18 per cent to 19 per cent and to the rise in the price of petroleum products.

8. Current expenditure, on the other hand, was higher than planned because of a wage and salary increase. In any event, the Central African Government is predicting a growth rate of 3 per cent for 2006. This recovery will remain fragile, however, since GDP growth will continue to depend on public expenditure levels and on timber and mineral exports. The Central African authorities will have to continue and intensify their efforts to put public finances on a sounder footing and to rein in expenditure.

9. The operation to verify the names on the civil-service payroll and on the register of pension recipients represented a significant step forward in achieving savings for the payment of wages and pensions. However, these savings will be insufficient to cover back wages and compensation for State officials and agents.

10. Vigorous reforms should be introduced with respect to transparency in public management, the administration of justice and anti-corruption efforts, with a view to strengthening public finances and paying off external debt so that international cooperation will resume. In this connection, the satisfactory implementation of the

economic programme for 2006, currently being carried out with support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the form of emergency post-conflict assistance, should bring the Central African Republic closer to the conclusion of an agreement under the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility.

11. The humanitarian situation has deteriorated sharply over the past few months, particularly in the north-western part of the country, where civilian populations have left their villages and taken refuge in the fields or forests or across the border in Chad as a result of the insecurity created by the armed rebel movements, attacks by robbers who set up roadblocks and reprisals by the armed forces. It is difficult to gain access to these populations, in part because they live far from the areas where services are provided and because there are no civilian authorities in many places.

12. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee estimates that more than 30,000 people from the subprefectures of Paoua, Markounda, Batangafo and Kabo are in need of emergency assistance in the form of basic health care, food, water and sanitation, as well as protection. The provision of seeds for subsistence farming will also be necessary, given the approach of the rainy season, which is the period between harvests in this area.

13. Despite the prevailing insecurity in these areas, basic health care and food and non-food assistance was provided to the population by the World Food Programme (WFP), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) through international NGOs operating in the Paoua and Markounda areas bordering on Chad. The international community's response is still insufficient, having met only 14.17 per cent of the existing needs, and is not commensurate with the severe humanitarian crisis taking shape in the Central African Republic. A review of the 2006 Consolidated Appeals Process is under way with a view to better meeting the needs of populations living in insecure conditions in the northern part of the country.

14. The United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) for the Central African Republic, which covers the period 2004-2006, has remained the strategic frame of reference for United Nations action. The country team has also prepared and validated, with the Central African authorities, a further UNDAF for the period 2007-2011. Strengthening democratic governance, respect for human rights, post-conflict recovery, poverty reduction and efforts to combat HIV/AIDS are the main areas of cooperation. In terms of governance and crisis prevention, UNDP has continued its activities to reintegrate former combatants, in cooperation with the World Bank.

15. The local UNHCR office has continued to register urban refugees in Bangui; such refugees now number 5,134. On 1 February 2006, the Central African Republic, the Sudan and UNHCR signed a tripartite agreement on the repatriation of Sudanese refugees, making it possible to begin returning them. Thus far, 2,115 refugees, out of a total of 12,000 living in Mboki in the south-eastern part of the Central African Republic, have been repatriated. On 15 April 2006, UNHCR suspended its operations because of the Government's decision to close its border with the Sudan.

16. With respect to food security, WFP has continued its efforts to meet the nutritional needs of the most vulnerable population groups, particularly women, children under the age of 5 and persons living with HIV/AIDS. It has also pursued its school feeding programmes. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has extended the distribution of seeds and tools to vulnerable farmers and has supported the development of school vegetable gardens. UNICEF has stepped up its efforts to improve the quality of education and has extended its child survival and development programme in the Central African Republic.

17. WHO has focused on strengthening the national health information system and epidemiological surveillance. Together with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), it has continued to assist victims of post-conflict sexual violence and to support the emergency obstetric and neonatal care system. The United Nations system has intensified its HIV/AIDS prevention activities and has sought to involve the population in those efforts. The Central African Republic has the highest seroprevalence rate in central Africa and the tenth highest rate worldwide. This situation poses a serious threat to its development.

IV. Human rights situation

18. The overall human rights situation has clearly deteriorated since the beginning of the year. There have been many abuses and violations of the right to life. In particular, there have been many reports of arbitrary or summary execution; torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment; arbitrary arrest and detention; violation of time limits on police custody; and restriction of the freedom of movement. The execution of Staff Sergeant Sanzé early in the year by members of the Presidential Guard; the assassination of the mayor of Bossangoa, for which rebels have claimed responsibility; the killing of the mayor of the municipality of Koron-Mpoko and his son by unidentified armed individuals; and the murder of two local physicians on official mission in the northern part of the country are tragic examples of the violations perpetrated in the Central African Republic.

19. In the "Sanzé/Kapita" case, in particular, it should be recalled that, on the night of 2-3 January 2006, in the Boy-Rabe neighbourhood of the fourth arrondissement of Bangui, Lieutenant Yango Kapita was fatally shot by Staff Sergeant Sanzé when the lieutenant and his men went to the latter's home after an altercation at a bar. Following this crime, Sergeant Sanzé was taken to BONUCA, where he spent the night. At the request of the government procurator, the next morning he was handed over to a criminal investigation officer appointed by the procurator to continue the proceedings.

20. Both the government procurator and the criminal investigation officer assured BONUCA that Staff Sergeant Sanzé would be protected until his trial. After a hearing by the criminal investigation officer, he was incarcerated in the Research and Investigation Section of the National Gendarmerie. He was subsequently removed and summarily executed by members of the Presidential Guard who had been close to Lieutenant Yango Kapita. BONUCA has been informed that the government investigation being carried out by the Director-General of the Gendarmerie is still under way.

21. On 14 and 15 February 2006, the BONUCA Human Rights Section participated in a seminar-workshop to validate the report of a study on education for

citizenship and peace in the Central African Republic. The participants strongly recommended, among other things, that education in the areas of human rights, citizenship and peace should be a Government priority and that human rights modules should be integrated into school curricula. The BONUCA human rights branch offices in Bouar and Bossangoa (located, respectively, 450 km north-west and 305 km north of Bangui) held workshops in a number of provincial towns on civil and political rights, women's rights, the rights of the child, and women and decision-making authority. In the coming weeks, the activities of the BONUCA Human Rights Section will be further decentralized through the opening of a third regional human rights office in Bambari.

22. The BONUCA Information Unit continued to conduct outreach work and to disseminate information on the Office's activities. It broadcast radio programmes on human rights and the ideals of peace. As part of the Office's activities to promote respect for human rights and to create a climate of peace, the Unit organized panel discussions and awareness-raising campaigns in Bangui and in provincial towns on the theme "Central Africans want peace". It also continued to provide capacity-building services for media professionals, both public and private.

V. Military and security situation

23. The security situation in the Central African Republic remains precarious and worrisome. Apart from some night-time robberies, Bangui seems to be enjoying a lull in the violence thanks to Central African Armed Forces patrols, supported by members of the Multinational Force (FOMUC) of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC). In more remote areas, however, particularly in the north, the security of civilian populations is undermined by abuses committed by armed gangs, "roadblockers" and rebels seeking to destabilize the country.

24. In January and February, the town of Paoua (500 km north of Bangui) was the scene of clashes between Central African Armed Forces soldiers and unidentified armed men. The attackers targeted public services: the police station, the gendarmerie station and the military base. The reaction by the regular forces gave rise to many abuses, forcing the local populations to leave their villages.

25. The Central African Government is faced with an armed rebellion, based in the northern part of the country, whose aim is to overthrow the regime of President François Bozizé. The rebellion includes four armed groups: the Union des Forces Républicaines (UFR) of Lieutenant Florian Ndjadder, a former Armed Forces officer; the Armée pour la Restauration de la République et la Démocratie (APRD), whose spokesman is Lieutenant Larma, a deserter from the Armed Forces recently arrested in Bangui; the Mouvement Patriotique pour la Restauration de la République Centrafricaine (MPRC) led by Stève Guéret, who has claimed responsibility for killing the mayor of Bossangoa; and the Front Démocratique du Peuple Centrafricain (FDPC) of Abdoulaye Miskine, who was once a militiaman under former President Ange Félix Patassé and was previously considered to have close ties with Lieutenant Larma's APRD.

26. The members of these four movements, their sources of financing, the political support they may enjoy and their rear bases have not been positively identified. It may, however, be presumed that the Central African Republic/Cameroon/Chad tripartite initiative, which since December 2005 has authorized the three countries'

regular armies to cross their common borders in pursuing armed groups or roadblockers that are threatening their stability, is making it difficult for rebel groups to establish a long-term presence in the territory of any of the three countries or to use them as a rear base.

VI. Subregional situation

27. Since April 2006, rebels hostile to the regime of President Déby Itno have crossed through the north-eastern part of the Central African Republic to attack the forces of the Chadian National Army. On 25 and 26 April 2006, an Antonov 35 aircraft unloaded armed men and military equipment in the Central African locality of Tiringoulou in the north-eastern part of the country, thereby violating the Central African Republic's territorial integrity. The Central African Government has strongly objected to these repeated incursions and has closed its border with the Sudan. However, there is every indication that armed individuals have established a foothold in the north-eastern part of the Central African Republic.

28. The country's security situation remains very volatile and, in some respects, highly dependent on the situation in neighbouring Chad and Sudan. The Central African Republic is a victim of the tension between Chad and the Sudan, which accuse each other of supporting rebels hostile to their respective regimes, even though the provision of such support is prohibited under the Tripoli Agreement signed by the two leaders on 8 February 2006. This atmosphere of mutual distrust and suspicion has paved the way for arms proliferation in the subregion, particularly in the north-eastern part of the Central African Republic, which the Central African Armed Forces have been unable to control for lack of adequate manpower and logistics. The Central African Government is understandably concerned about this state of affairs and is requesting support from bilateral and multilateral partners to help it carry out activities to promote the return of refugees and to revive production in this part of the national territory. A subregional approach should therefore be taken to stabilizing the situation in the Central African Republic, pending the effective restructuring of the Armed Forces and the enhancement of their capacity as a means of helping Central Africans to better control the whole of the national territory.

29. The restructuring of the Armed Forces is progressing slowly. While three battalions have completed their training and a fourth is currently being trained, the Armed Forces are not in a position to secure the national territory, even with support from FOMUC. The Office's military team has taken part in training workshops. The Civilian Police Section has continued to monitor the country's security situation, both in Bangui and in the provinces. It monitors and evaluates criminal investigators newly trained by the Directorate-General of the Central African Police in partnership with the Office and French technical cooperation experts. The Section is currently involved in the work of the technical committee in charge of drawing up a draft restructuring programme for the Central African Police. It has organized a series of training internships for the police and the National Gendarmerie, including one on the maintenance of law and order, in which 61 police officers participated, and another for the training of 43 criminal investigation officers.

VII. Comments

30. The emergence of rebel movements in the northern part of the country, the situation in Chad and tension between that country and the Sudan seriously threatened the relative stability that had prevailed in the Central African Republic since my last report. The area where the borders of the three countries intersect could quickly become one fraught with turmoil likely to attract more armed groups, mercenaries and rebels willing to participate in any action likely to destabilize the countries of the subregion. As a subregional force, FOMUC continues to play a key role in efforts to make the country more secure. I therefore welcome the European Commission's recommendation to the European Union that it continue to finance FOMUC until 30 June 2007. I call upon other partners to support FOMUC in order to increase its strength and thus help the Government to tackle insecurity in the country.

31. While the Central African authorities must take primary responsibility for the stability of the country, the development of a subregional approach appears vital given the current situation along the country's borders. Such an approach should involve, at best, all the States of the Central African subregion and, at a minimum, all the country's neighbours, including Chad. I will therefore have to continue my contacts, through my Special Representative, with leaders of the subregion in order to help them in their efforts to achieve lasting stability in their region with the support of the international community. In that regard, I invite the international community to intensify its efforts to make borders more secure, especially those between Chad, the Central African Republic and the Sudan, in order to discourage any attempts by armed movements to settle temporarily or permanently in those countries, since such movements are a threat to the local populations and to refugees and displaced persons. Movements of armed groups in the northern part of the Central African Republic constitute a serious threat to the country's stability and to that of all its neighbours.

32. In order to build civil peace and democracy in the Central African Republic on a firm foundation of unity and national reconciliation, it is vital that the Government should engage in a permanent dialogue with all national social and political stakeholders. Such an approach would make it easier to seek appropriate, consensual and quick solutions to any issues of national concern facing the State. It is in this spirit that I urge President Bozizé to work towards promoting justice and respect for the rule of law, which are central to peace. I urge him to shed light on the serious human rights violations committed in recent months in his country and to put an end to impunity by bringing those responsible for the violations to justice.

33. The Central African Republic continues to suffer from the adverse impact of its political and military crises, its non-productive enterprises and its weak private sector. I therefore urge its bilateral and international partners to continue to support the Central African authorities in their efforts to improve public finances and governance with a view to signing as soon as possible an agreement with the international financial institutions under the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility.

34. I would like to take this opportunity to once again hail the efforts that CEMAC member States have been making in support of the Central African authorities since the end of the electoral process. I would also like to pay tribute to the different

FOMUC contingents that have been making every effort to support the Central African armed forces in their efforts to maintain security and peace in the country.

35. I should like to pay a heartfelt tribute to my Special Representative, General Lamine Cissé, and to the staff of the entire United Nations system in the Central African Republic for their dedicated performance of their functions during this particularly difficult and challenging period.